

Repair the World MLK Day of Service Reflection Resource



Introduction

The activities below will help you lead a conversation with program participants, and better ensure a meaningful experience for volunteers and the community you're serving with.

At its best, service should spark some uncomfortable questions and challenges about injustice, inequality, and our own role in perpetuating them or bringing about change. It's important to create opportunities for volunteers to reflect upon their service so that they can "think out loud" before, during, and/or immediately after the volunteer activity. This allows participants to contemplate their service experience in the greater context of their (Jewish and/or human) values and life decisions, enabling them to consider their larger roles and responsibilities in the world. Participants should analyze different points of view and be guided in growing as thoughtful individuals and active citizens.

Before Serving

Before starting your service activity, take 15 minutes to reflect as a group on your intentions for the day and how you want to frame your service work.

Read the following two texts out loud and use the prompt to set intentions:

I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

*I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. I believe that even amid today's mortar bursts and whining bullets, there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men. **I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down, men other-centered can build up.***

- Martin Luther King's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964.

In a place where there is not someone of moral courage taking responsibility, strive to be that person.

- Hillel, Pirkei Avot 2:6 and commentaries

Reflection Prompts:

- What “audacious belief” is driving you to be here and serve this MLK Weekend?
- What spark of “moral courage” are you hoping to bring from within you into this experience?

After Serving

Read the following excerpts out loud and discuss the guiding prompts:

Judaism teaches an ‘emphatic justice’ which seeks to make people identify themselves with each other- with each other’s needs, with each other’s hopes and aspirations, and with each other’s defeats and frustrations. Because Jews have known the distress of slaves and the loneliness of strangers, we are to project ourselves into their souls and make their plight our own.

- Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, “Torah concept of Emphatic Justice can bring peace,” *The Jewish Week*, 3 April, 1977:19.

In real life, solidarity takes many forms, almost all of them hard. This kind of low-cost, risk-free, E-Z solidarity is only possible in a social-media age, where you can strike a pose and somebody sees it on their timeline for 15 seconds and then they move on and it’s forgotten except for the feeling of accomplishment it gave you. Solidarity is hard because it isn’t about imaginary identifications, it’s about struggling across the canyon of not being someone else: it’s about recognizing, for instance, that somebody died because they were different from you, in what they did or believed or wore or wore, not because they were the same.

- Excerpt from “Why I am not Charlie,” *A Paper Bird*, 9 January 2015.

Reflection Prompts:

- How do these texts understand the idea of “solidarity”?
- Are there moments from your experience today that resonate, in light of these two texts?
- How does this kind of solidarity relate to the solidarity that can be built when you serve in partnership with your community?